Healthy Forests Report

October 1, 2006 – ***Final 2006 Report Expected December 1, 2006***

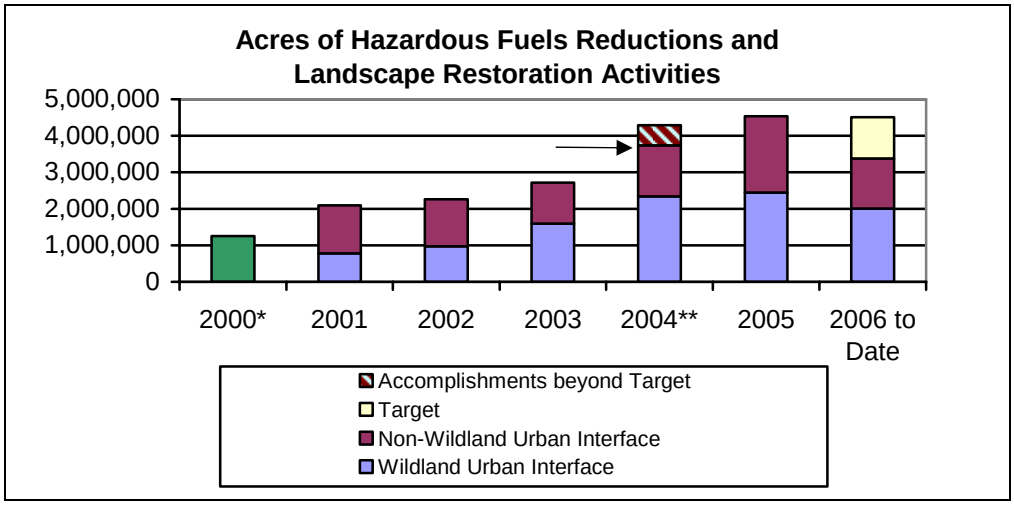
The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service implement the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) in order to help save the lives of firefighters and citizens and to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to our communities, forests, and rangelands.

HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION & LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROJECTS

An excessive accumulation of hazardous or unusually flammable fuels in our forests, woodlands, and grasslands is the root cause of the unprecedented fire risk facing our public lands. Land managers remove hazardous fuels via programs funded specifically for that purpose and in other programs whose principle goal is the achievement of a variety of resource management objectives that can be broadly labeled landscape restoration. Treatments occur both inside and outside the wildland urban interface (WUI).

1. Inside the WUI treatments reduce fuels around homes, communities, and resources to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening these high-value areas.
2. Beyond the WUI, treatments not only help protect communities by creating conditions that enable firefighters to more successfully suppress fires before they enter the WUI but also reduce fire severity and its impact on valued landscapes and natural resources.

From 2001 through the end of August 2006, the Federal land management agencies have treated over 18 million acres of federal lands under the Healthy Forest Initiative and the National Fire Plan through landscape restoration actions. The effectiveness of these treatments in protecting communities and resources from fire has been demonstrated numerous times.



* FY 2000 is used as a baseline for reporting, as the NFP was implemented in FY 2001. Treatment location was not included in reporting prior to FY 2001.

** Acres treated under landscape restoration activities were not reported prior to FY 2004.

Table 1: Hazardous Fuels & Landscape Restoration Activities, FY 2006 *(as of 8/30/06)*

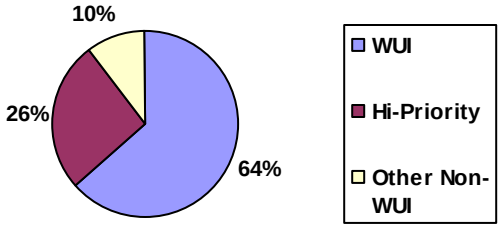
	Hazardous Fuels Appropriations		Landscape Restoration Appropriations		
Treatment Type	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**TOTAL**
Forest Service	1,032,466	359,666	284,604	594,618	**2,271,354**
DOI	573,173	429,571	27,437	74,661	**1,104,842**
TOTAL	**1,605,639**	**789,237**	**312,041**	**665,047**	**3,376,196**

Note: Total includes acres treated through State Fire Assistance hazard mitigation grants and Wildland Fire Use.

Hazardous Fuels and Landscape Restoration Priorities

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior design hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities to meet one of three objectives:

1. Directly reduce wildfire threats within the wildland urban interface.
2. Treat areas outside of the wildland-urban interface (non-WUI) that are at greatest risk of catastrophic wildland fire. These *high priority non-WUI treatments* reduce the risk of unwanted fire to natural resources, achieve other natural resource management objectives, and, in some cases also serve to protect WUI areas.



3. Maintain desired landscape conditions achieved through previous treatments outside the WUI in order to retain the associated benefits.

HEALTHY FORESTS AUTHORITIES

Implementation of activities under the HFI and HFRA authorities can be summarized as a three-step process:

1. NEPA Planning and Decisions – Activities that will require NEPA Decisions are identified (this generally occurs up to 3 years prior to actual project implementation). The planning is typically broad in scope, and may include multiple treatments.
2. Analysis and Preparation – Project preparation and design generally occur in the year prior to implementation. Project scope, location and treatment type are refined.
3. Treatment Planning and Accomplishment – Final planning and implementation occur.

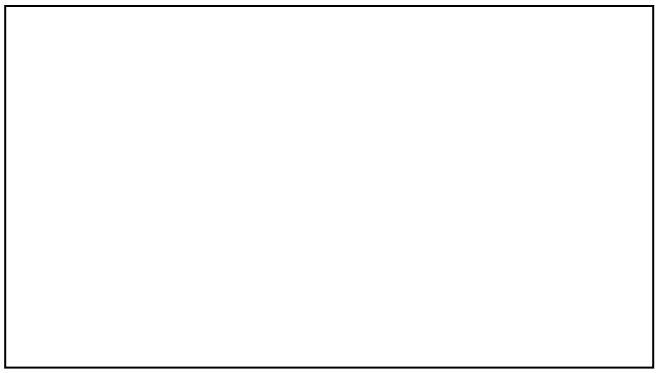
Table 2: Healthy Forests Activities, FY 2006

Treatments Planned	Treatments Completed	Acres Planned	HFI/HFRA Acres Completed
2,744	1,851	555,161	394,231

UTILIZATION OF FOREST BYPRODUCTS

Byproducts removed during hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities are often utilized in certain forest products (e.g., timber, engineered lumber, paper and pulp, furniture) and bio-energy and bio-based products (e.g., plastics, ethanol, and diesel). To date, the Forest Service and DOI have treated 534,463 acres mechanically; of these, 41% have included biomass utilization.

Biomass Utilization from All Mechanically Treated Acres



STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS AWARDED

Stewardship contracting includes natural resource management activities that improve land conditions. These projects shift the focus of federal forest and rangeland management towards a desired future resource condition. They are also a means for federal agencies to contribute to the development of sustainable rural communities, maintain healthy forest ecosystems, and provide a continuing source of local income and employment.

Table 3: Stewardship Contracts & Agreements

	Bureau of Land Management		**Forest Service**	
2003	2 contracts	300 acres	50 contracts	14,000 acres
2004	22 contracts	15,000 acres	64 contracts	42,000 acres
2005	58 contracts awarded	15,000 acres	45 contracts	35,500 acres
2006	32 contracts awarded	13,648 acres	47 contracts	38,000 acres
Total	**320 contracts / agreements for 173,443 acres***			

*Not all projects in table above were authorized under HFRA.

HFRA TITLE IV: APPLIED RESEARCH

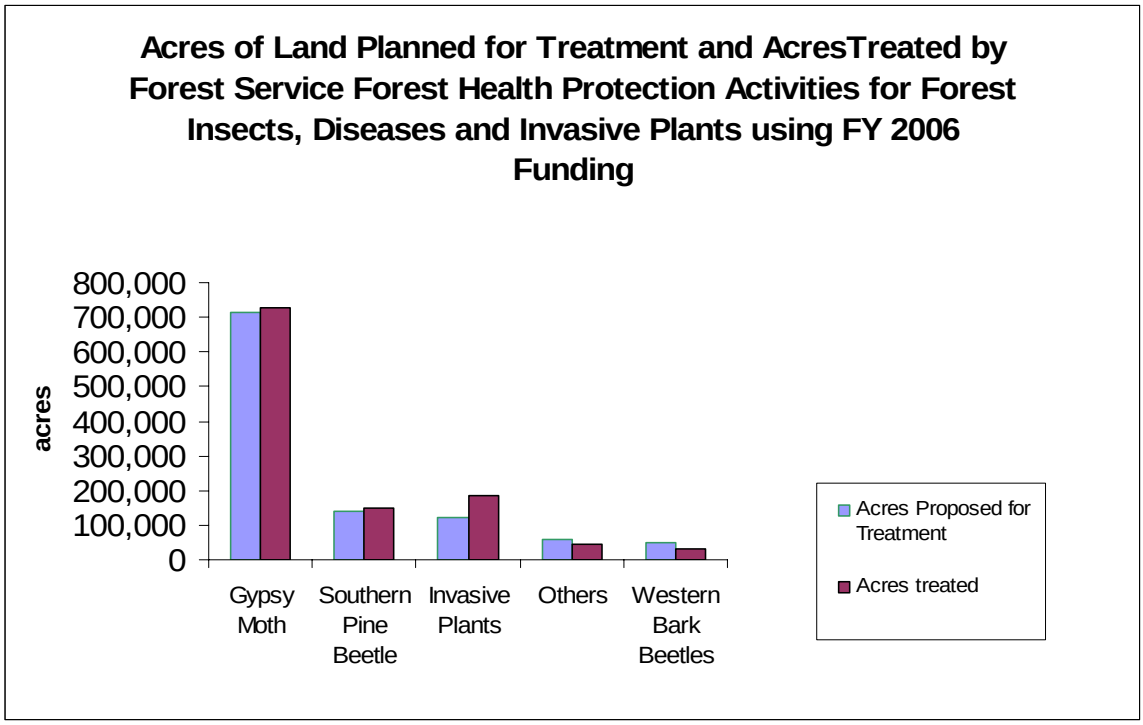
The Forest Service's applied research projects, in partnership with several universities and state forestry agencies, aim to conduct and evaluate different land management practices that reduce problems associated with the current outbreaks of insects and diseases and to translate that information for practicing professionals, landowners, and the public.

There are currently 6 Silvicultural Assessment and 6 Accelerated Information Gathering projects planned or underway. For more information of the Forest Service's Applied Research Projects under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, please visit:

http://www.healthyforests.gov/applied_research/index.html

INVASIVE SPECIES AND FOREST HEALTH

In FY 2006, Forest Service Forest Health Protection activities include both prevention and suppression efforts and provided resources to restore lands impacted by native and nonnative forest pests on federal, state and private lands. Some of the nonnative pests addressed included: hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, sudden oak death, emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, European wood wasp, cycad scale, wiliwili gall wasp and invasive plants. Over one million acres are planned for treatment as a result of Forest Health Protection efforts funded in FY 2006.



All projects planned for southern pine beetle and most for western bark beetles improve condition class. Nearly 141,000 acres for southern pine beetle and 33,000 acres for western bark beetles are proposed for thinning, planting, sanitation or site preparation treatments on state, private, and federal lands. These treatments improve condition class. To date, over 149,000 acres have been reported accomplished for southern pine beetle and almost 24,000 acres for western bark beetles.

FOREST SERVICE USE OF THE ESA COUNTERPART REGULATIONS

Since the training module on procedures, the Section 7 consultation standards of review, and monitoring was prepared in May, 2004, over 319 Forest Service line officers, and over 561 biologists have both taken the training and been certified to use the regulations. Through February, 2006, over 100 NFP projects had used the process. The evaluation of counterpart regulation use is ongoing, and results of that will be used to make any needed improvements in the use of this important tool.

Virginia Department of Forestry

High Knob Community Hazard Mitigation and FIREWISE Project

The High Knob Community project in Northwest Virginia near the city of Winchester, VA is an example of what can happen in a very short period of time when an organized, high energy community gets involved with a well developed state hazard mitigation program. High Knob is a 470-home gated community with 16 miles of roads, located in extremely mountainous terrain. The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) contacted the High Knob Community Association Manager in early 2006 because the Virginia Statewide Risk Assessment indicated High Knob was one of their highest risk communities. A Community Risk Assessment was conducted, confirming that the community was at extremely high wildfire risk and identifying specific steps that could be taken to reduce the risk. The community then developed a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The community quickly got busy mailing a flyer to residences announcing a community Earth Day/Hazard Mitigation/FIREWISE Meeting, attended by approximately 70 residents. They secured a VDOF hazard mitigation grant through the National Fire Plan funded "Money for Mitigation" program. The community used funds to chip hazardous fuels and cut vegetation back from roads to make the community more assessable to fire apparatus. The local volunteer fire department surveyed the area and provided information on where cul-de-sacs and turn arounds needed to be constructed or improved. Seventy individual home fire risk assessments have been conducted in the community. High Knob has just achieved certification as a FIREWISE Community USA. House number signs have been received and will be installed to make it easier for first responders to identify locations. Additional community work days to do more hazard mitigation work are already planed.

High Knob is a great model of collaboration and a shining example of the work that can be accomplished to reduce wildfire danger to communities with the assistance of NFP funding.